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Businessman Says He Tipped Off U.S.

J By STUART DIAMOND

An Oregon businessman said yesterday that he was told by Government intelligence sources early this year that the Defense Department was planning to buy weapons for Nicaraguan rebels with profits from the sale of arms to Iran.

The businessman, Richard J. Brenneke, said he informed a senior military assistant to Vice President Bush, and was told, "We will look into it."

The disclosures of the sale of arms to Iran and the diversion of profits to the Nicaraguan rebels, and whether these actions violate Congressional bans, have created a public furor.

Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d said on Tuesday that only two people in the Government knew of the plan to supply the Nicaraguan rebels, Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter, the national security adviser, and Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North, a member of the admiral's staff. Both men have now left their posts.

No Independent Confirmation

Mr. Meese also said that the diversion of money to the Nicaraguan rebels had been discovered only last weekend.

Mr. Brenneke's statements, which could not be independently confirmed, would place knowledge of the Nicaraguan connection at wider and higher levels in Washington and at an earlier time than has been disclosed.

The businessman made his comments in a telephone interview yesterday in response to the release by the Government under court order of his confidential memos to various Government officials, including the Vice President, from Nov. 30, 1985, to Feb. 25, 1986.

The memos were released Wednesday to defense attorneys in an Iran arms sale case being tried in Federal court in Manhattan. The documents deal exclusively with Iran and not the Nicaraguan contras, but allege many new details of the Iranian arms sale.

For instance, one memo said that last December Mr. Poindexter approved the sale of 10,000 anti-tank missiles to Iran. That is five times the number of missiles the Government has said Iran has received.

Soviet Arms Offered to U.S.

The documents also say Iran put \$1 billion into an account with Chemical Bank in New York to pay for the arms, and offered the United States captured Russian tanks and an unexploded Russian bomb for examination.

There is no independent corroboration of such a deposit or of the delivery of the missiles or Russian equipment.

The documents, which run 31 pages, contain many details, including bank account numbers, dates and the location of equipment. Mr. Brenneke, who heads a real estate management company near Portland, said he learned much of the information about Iran through a variety of business contacts with people who have become well known in arms sale efforts to Iran. He said various senior Government officials provided him with other information during his months of contacts with them, ending last May.

"I was told by officials in the U.S. intelligence community that the information was extremely accurate," he said. He added that he had originally written the memos because his contacts with Iran had indicated to him that hostages might be released in exchange for arms — a trade that eventually came about.

"It was to foster discussions between the United States and Iran for an extremely good cause," said Mr. Brenneke, 45 years old, a former teacher at St. John's University and the president of G.P.I. management, Inc., a Lake Oswego, Oregon, firm that manages more than 500 condominiums and apartments in the Portland area.

He added, "Had I thought the information would ever be made public, I never would have written it."

One-Page Letter of Response

Among Mr. Brenneke's memos is a one-page letter of response on the Vice President's letterhead from Lieut. Col. E. Douglas Menarchik, military assistant and aide to Mr. Bush. The Feb. 6 memo said the United States Government "will not permit or participate in the provision of war materiel to Iran and will prosecute any such efforts by U.S. citizens."

It has recently been disclosed that President Reagan three weeks before, on Jan. 17, had specifically approved the providing of arms to Iran.

Mr. Brenneke said he later had various telephone conversations with Colonel Menarchik. He said Colonel Menarchik told him the letter was simply a public policy statement to protect a covert operation.

In the phone conversations, Mr. Brenneke said, the Vice President's aide disclosed some details of the arms shipments to Iran. "They indicated they would like more information from me," Mr. Brenneke said.

Efforts to contact Mr. Poindexter and the staff of Mr. Bush yesterday were unsuccessful.

Disclosure Was Resisted

Disclosure of the businessman's memos, which are marked "confidential," was resisted by the United States Attorney's office in the Southern District of New York but finally made public this week. The case involves various defendants who contend they were assured through intermediaries that high American officials, including Mr. Bush, needed their services in shipping arms to Iran. But before the arrangement was consummated, they were arrested by Customs Services officials, the defendants contend.

"The Government essentially approved but Customs didn't know that," said William M. Kunstler, an attorney for one of the defendants, a businessman, Nico Minardos. In tapes made secretly by the Government, the defendants discuss by telephone purported approvals by top American officials.

The United States Attorney's office contends that the case has no connection with the Government's covert arms shipments to Iran.

It is also unclear what relationship the memos by Mr. Brenneke, offering to aid in shipping arms to Iran, have to the New York case or to the actual covert operations.

Repeated Talks With Officials

The Oregon businessmen said he made his contacts in Europe and

through various other means. He said the American officials said they were grateful for the information and that senior Defense Department and intelligence officials talked with him repeatedly. The Defense Department, he said, confirmed that Mr. Poindexter approved the sale of 10,000 missiles and that the Defense Department was involved in the shipments to Iran.

Mr. Brenneke's memos said the Iranian code name for the weapons sale was "Demavend," the name of a mountain east of Teheran. As early as June 1985 American national security officials approved the sale of 110 fighter planes to Iran, which involved the deposit of funds into Bank Lambert in Brussels and City Bank in Dubai, he said. But the deal fell through because the Central Intelligence Agency, which was to manage it, had too many differences with the Iranians, the memos said.

The businessman said intelligence sources "did indicate to me that money was accumulating in Switzerland for the purchase of weapons" for Nicaraguan contras, he said. He added that the Defense Department was to be involved in the purchase of those weapons.

He said the kinds of weapons being discussed provided further evidence that they were earmarked for Nicaragua. "Some of the weapons were designed to be used in the jungle," he said.